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**Title:** The Realization and Fulfillment of Life Aspirations by Children and Youth from the Polish-Czech Borderland

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**Citation style:** Ogrodzka-Mazur Ewa. (2017). The Realization and Fulfillment of Life Aspirations by Children and Youth from the Polish-Czech Borderland. "The New Educational Review" (Vol. 47, iss. 1 (2017), s. 66-80), doi 10.15804/tner.2017.47.1.05



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## The Realization and Fulfillment of Life Aspirations by Children and Youth from the Polish-Czech Borderland

DOI: 10.15804/tner.2017.47.1.05

### Abstract

What is discussed in the presented study are the transformations in the realization and fulfillment of life aspirations of children and youth from the Polish-Czech borderland. This is done in reference to Carol S. Dweck's concept of motivation and life aspirations, according to which they are fulfilled in two different ways depending on how the nature of human abilities and the reaction to difficulty and failure are understood.

The studies conducted in 1990–1991 and 2014–2015, with the application of the strategy of longitudinal comparisons based on the time criterion, enabled both the recognition of some factors which affected the fulfillment of life aspirations by the young, and the presentation of the relative dynamics of the change and capturing the mechanisms which determine it.

**Keywords:** *values, life aspirations, dynamics of change, cultural borderland, multi- and intercultural education*

### Introduction

The examined groups of learners from the Polish-Czech borderland are children and youth in an intensive period of shaping their ego identity. Firstly, this shaping comprises the process of interpersonal, inter-psychic comparisons, during which the feeling of individuality (ego separateness) is developed. Secondly, forming ego

identity involves the process of intrapersonal, intra-psychic comparisons, which enhances both the feeling of one's own individuality and the feeling of integrity, and thirdly – it comprises the process of temporal comparisons, which constitutes the basis for the feeling of ego continuity. These processes determine the individual's search, in the whole individual life, for the answer to three fundamental identity questions: What kind of person am I? Who am I? Why am I? (Staś-Romanowska, 2004, p. 51; Wojciszke, 2010, p. 184). It is especially the second question where the need appears for axiological self-definition (a conscious choice and acceptance of values), as well as for undertaking the activities compliant with the chosen values (their fulfillment, which leads the individual to intellectual and emotional-social maturity, and the axiological maturity that constitutes an important determinant of the individual's identity). According to Adam Węgrzecki, axiological maturity can be treated as “the skillfulness in referring to values, [...] which is not unilateral, [...], concerns different values and – depending on the type of values – can become differentiated, [...] is manifested by a certain kind of faithfulness to the selected values and determined by the feeling of inner freedom” (Węgrzecki, 1994, pp. 19–21). In the perspective of the undertaken discussion, it seems interesting to familiarize with the examined learners' opinions on the possibilities of fulfilling their declared life aspirations – with their “skillfulness” in reference to selected values.

The presented results of the studies conducted at the turn of 2014/15 constitute a record of the current state – after 24 years of social and civilization transformations, which have affected both Polish and Czech societies (joining NATO in 1999, the European Union in 2004, the Schengen Zone in 2007)<sup>1</sup>.

In the latest studies, the strategy of longitudinal comparisons was applied, which was based on the time criterion and aimed at understanding the mechanisms of change and the factors determining the behavior of particular individuals and groups living in the same socio-economic and cultural period. Diagnostic poll was

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<sup>1</sup> Both the 1990–1991 and 2014–2015 studies were conducted by the research staff of the Department of General Pedagogy (currently the Department of General Pedagogy and Research Methodology) at the Faculty of Ethnology and Educational Science (University of Silesia), under the scientific supervision of Professor Tadeusz Lewowicki. The theoretical and methodological assumptions, the research results and their interpretation are discussed in detail in the book by T. Lewowicki, E. Ogrodzka-Mazur, A. Minczanowska, G. Piechaczek-Ogierman: *Sfery życia duchowego dzieci i młodzieży – studium z pogranicza polsko-czeskiego* [The spheres of spiritual life of children and youth – a study from the Polish-Czech borderland]. Vol. 1. *Przemiany wartości i aspiracji życiowych* [Transformations of values and life aspirations]. Cieszyn–Toruń 2016, Wydział Etnologii i Nauk o Edukacji Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.

applied with the use of (repeatable) panel method, which assumed conducting, at least twice in a certain time span, the measurement of a certain group of people in regard to the same feature. This is aimed at capturing the dynamics of a particular phenomenon. Such studies allow not only for presenting the relative dynamics of change but also for capturing certain mechanisms which determine this dynamics (Frankfort-Nachmias, Nachmias, 2001, pp. 153–154; Pilch, Bauman, 2001, pp. 39–42).

The model of analysis for the investigated issues has been operationally approached in the form of a multivariate analysis of variance with the measurements of the variables. This was done in the same way as in the studies conducted at the turn of 1990/91 (Ogrodzka-Mazur, 1992, pp. 82–93) in two environments: Poles living and educated in Poland and the children and youth of Polish nationality who live in Zaolzie in the Czech Republic and are educated in Czech schools with Polish as the teaching language. This model enabled the verification of the hypothesis on the similarities and differences between the examined groups in the fulfilled life aspirations.

The research comprised 377 learners – 183 from Polish state and private primary and middle schools situated in Cieszyn (105 girls and 78 boys) and their 194 peers from the Czech Republic (87 girls and 107 boys), educated in primary schools with Polish as the teaching language, situated in the counties of Karvina and Frydek-Mistek.

As in the 1990/91 studies, the participants were fourth-graders from primary schools (61 children from Poland and 74 from Zaolzie), the youth from second grade in Poland (122 people) and eighth-graders from primary schools in Zaolzie (120 people). In the Czech education system, the eighth grade of primary school is the counterpart of the second grade of Polish middle school.

The examined community of learners from the Polish-Czech borderland has been observing the changes taking place in Poland and the Czech Republic since the early nineties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The changes in both countries are partially similar but they have also some distinctively different features. The young from Zaolzie schools with Polish as the teaching language, who are Czech citizens and declare the feeling of Polish nationality, perceive these phenomena from a different angle – due to their daily life in culturally diversified environments and families. This is of particular significance in shaping their multidimensional cultural identity, the individual structure of axiological identity, and the fulfillment of their life goals.

## **The Realization and Fulfillment of Life Aspirations**

Referring to Carol S. Dweck's concept (Kofta, Doliński, 2000, pp. 588–591; Elliot, Dweck, 2005), it can be noticed on the basis of the respondents' answers that they fulfill their life goals in two different ways, depending on the understanding of the nature of human abilities and the reaction to difficulties and failure. Owing to their diligence, middle school learners from Poland aim mostly at fulfilling a particular criterion of performance in order to meet the expectations (extrinsic motivation) and to fulfil their own aspirations. Yet, their peers from Zaolzie are more frequently intrinsically motivated to acquire new knowledge and skills.

In comparison to fourth-graders, the examined youth to a larger extent make the fulfillment of their aspirations depend on other people and they indicate the variant *I do not know* significantly less often. Firstly, the attribution of more significance to other people is a dimension of social identity which is typical of adolescence – a dimension shaped by intensive contacts and interactions between people in the immediate and extended surroundings. However, youth do not manifest social bonds in the broader (cross-generation) sense, but head for implementing their own individual values (life goals). Secondly, the belonging of the learners from Zaolzie to the Polish national minority may hinder the process of inner integration and may result in the diffusion of social roles, values, ideas and attitudes which they apply in life and want to fulfill. On the other hand, owing to the contacts with the representatives of the majority, these young people “broaden” their developmental potentialities with the social dimension and they take into account the cultural heritage of their own society, which they now notice. Therefore, Maria Staś-Romanowska's standpoint can be confirmed, according to which the more unambiguous and stable the reference framework is for the experiences associated with one's own Self, the more certain and powerful the identity of this Self is (Staś-Romanowska, 2004, p. 58). The youth from the Polish-Czech borderland realize and fulfill their life aspirations in three basic perspectives of viewing themselves and the culturally diversified environment:

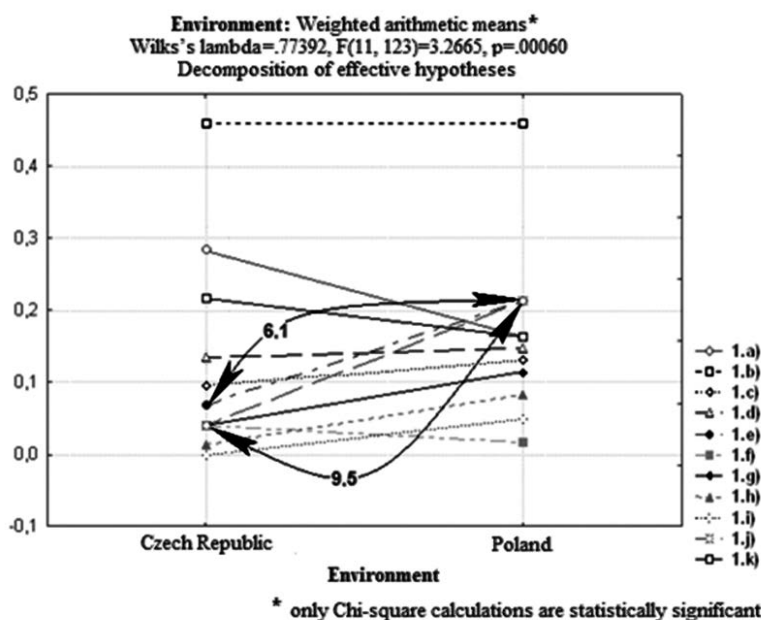
- the perspective indicated by the category of “time”, providing orientation in choices
- towards the present and future time, which are determined by traditions of their own group,
- the perspective indicated by the category of “identity structure”,
- the perspective referring to the category of “social role” (Urbański-Korż, 1998, pp. 19–21).

These perspectives are reflected in the respondents' answers concerning the fulfillment of life goals in four fields: (1) the goals they can achieve, (2) the ones which will be the easiest to achieve, (3) the ones they think cannot be achieved, and (4) the ones which they are already partially implementing.

Among the goals they can achieve (cf., Figure 1), the fourth-graders from the Czech part of the borderland as well as their Polish peers indicate peaceful life among family and friends (46%) as the most important. Fewer choices were given to comfortable life free of problems (28%) and life full of changes, adventures and attractions (22%).

The specific triad of family, comfortable and attractive life is compliant with these respondents' axiological preferences, which they will try to implement in their life. Choosing life goals which they can achieve, the fourth-graders in Poland,

**Figure 1.** Life goals which fourth-graders can fulfill



Key: a. comfortable life free of problems; b. peaceful life among family and friends; c. popularity, fame, success; d. exciting job, professional career; e. knowledge, education, scientific achievements; f. top position, supervising people, decision making; g. fortune, high living standards; h. implementation of moral values, respectable life; i. engagement in social issues, civil activeness; j. participation in culture, artistic activity, creativity; k. life full of changes, adventures and attractions.

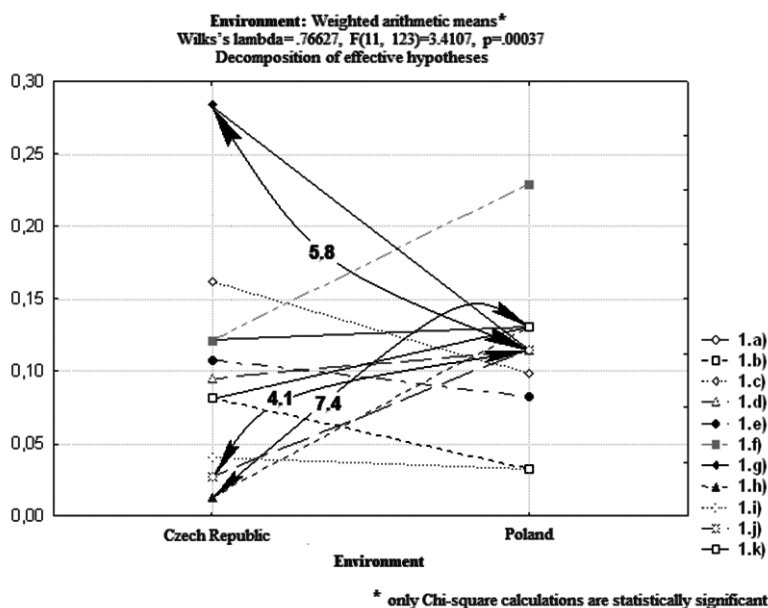
Source: own elaboration

more frequently than their peers from Zaolzie, indicate knowledge, education and scientific achievement ( $\chi^2 = 6.1$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ; for  $df = 1$ ) and participation in culture, artistic activity and creativity ( $\chi^2 = 9.5$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ; for  $df = 1$ ). These aspirations, however, do not belong to the subsystem of the respondents' highest rank values, which means that they do not identify the goals which they aim at with the ones they can achieve in life.

Among the goals which will be the easiest to achieve for all the learners, there are: peaceful life free of problems (36%) and achieving professional career (PL – 16%, CZ – 12%). The Polish children also more frequently indicate participation in culture (20%) and their peers from Zaolzie – life full of changes, adventures and attractions (23%).

Some interesting research results were obtained in reference to the learners' opinions on life goals which they will not be able to achieve (cf., Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** Life goals which fourth-graders are not able to fulfill



Key: a. comfortable life free of problems; b. peaceful life among family and friends; c. popularity, fame, success; d. exciting job, professional career; e. knowledge, education, scientific achievements; f. top position, supervising people, decision making; g. fortune, high living standards; h. implementation of moral values, respectable life; i. engagement in social issues, civil activeness; j. participation in culture, artistic activity, creativity; k. life full of changes, adventures and attractions.

Source: own elaboration

The children from Zaolzie declare here reaching fortune and high living standards (28%); popularity, fame and success (16%) and top positions and supervising people (12%). What is more, while choosing life aspirations which they think they will not be able to achieve, they indicate fortune and high living standards more frequently than their Polish peers ( $\chi^2 = 5.8$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ; for  $df = 1$ ).

In their declarations, the fourth-graders from the Polish part of the borderland are convinced that they will not achieve top positions associated with supervising other people and making decisions (23%), respectable life in compliance with moral values, as well as life full of changes, adventures or attractions (13%). More frequently than their peers from Zaolzie, they indicate implementation of moral values and respectable life ( $\chi^2 = 7.4$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ; for  $df = 1$ ) and participation in culture, artistic activity and creativity ( $\chi^2 = 4.1$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ; for  $df = 1$ ).

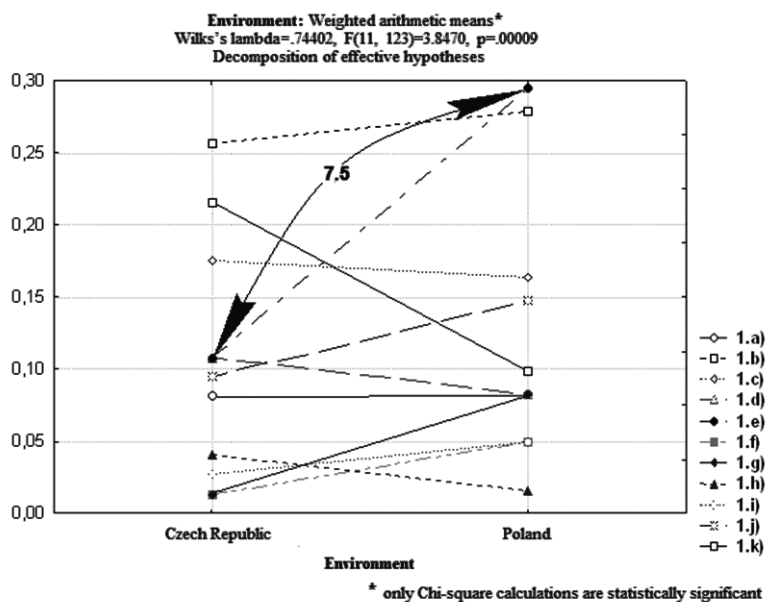
Among the life goals which are already being at least partially implemented by the children from the fourth grade in Zaolzie (cf., Figure 3), the following goals received the biggest number of indications: peaceful life among family and friends (26%); life full of changes, adventures and attractions (22%), and gaining popularity, fame and success (18%). The learners from Poland declare partial implementation of their aspirations mostly as regards the acquisition of knowledge and education (30%), leading a peaceful life among family and friends (28%) and achieving success (16%). Moreover, as regards the life goals which they are already partially implementing, they indicate, more often than their counterparts from Zaolzie, knowledge, education and scientific achievements ( $\chi^2 = 7.4$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ; for  $df = 1$ ).

The image of the implemented aspirations of the fourth-graders is differentiated by their environment and the preferred values. What can be noticed is the previously outlined tendency that the learners from the schools with Polish as the teaching language focus mostly on the set of goals associated with comfortable and attractive family life, which they can fulfill, they will be able to fulfill most easily, and they are already implementing – at least partially (Ogrodzka-Mazur, 2011, pp. 15–71). Most frequently, the children from the Polish part of the borderland do not identify the goals which they will aim at in life with the ones they can achieve. Moreover, in the context of economic, social and cultural determinants of their country, they present an overrated evaluation of their chances and possibilities concerning the implementation of all life aspirations.

The declarations of the Zaolzie youth from the eighth grade and the Polish middle school learners concerning the implementation of life goals which they can achieve, which are the easiest to achieve, which they think they will not fulfill,



**Figure 3.** Life goals which are already being partially implemented by fourth-graders



Key: a. comfortable life free of problems; b. peaceful life among family and friends; c. popularity, fame, success; d. exciting job, professional career; e. knowledge, education, scientific achievements; f. top position, supervising people, decision making; g. fortune, high living standards; h. implementation of moral values, respectable life; i. engagement in social issues, civil activeness; j. participation in culture, artistic activity, creativity; k. life full of changes, adventures and attractions.

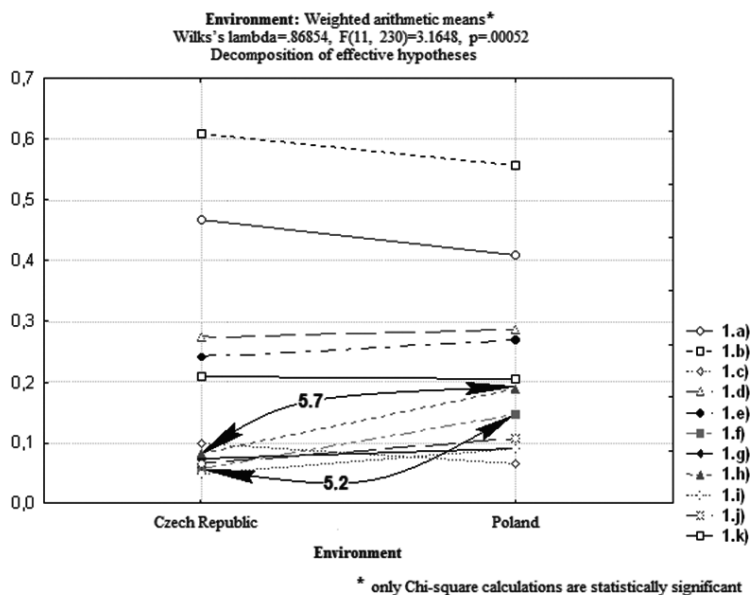
Source: own elaboration.

and which they are already partially implementing are very similar. In compliance with the order introduced by the respondents, they create the same arrangements.

The life goals which the youth can achieve in the broadest scope comprise (cf., Figure 4):

- peaceful life among family and friends (PL – 56%, CR – 61%),
- comfortable life free of problems (PL – 41%, CR – 47%),
- exciting job, professional career (PL – 29%, CR – 28%),
- knowledge, education, scientific achievements (PL – 27%, RC – 24%).

**Figure 4.** Life goals which the eighth-graders from the Czech Republic and second-graders from Polish middle school can fulfill



Key: a. comfortable life free of problems; b. peaceful life among family and friends; c. popularity, fame, success; d. exciting job, professional career; e. knowledge, education, scientific achievements; f. top position, supervising people, decision making; g. fortune, high living standards; h. implementation of moral values, respectable life; i. engagement in social issues, civil activeness; j. participation in culture, artistic activity, creativity; k. life full of changes, adventures and attractions.

Source: own elaboration.

While choosing life goals which they can fulfill, the middle school learners from Poland, more frequently than their peers from Zaolzie, indicate the achieving of top positions and supervising people ( $\chi^2 = 5.2$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ; for  $df = 1$ ), as well as implementing moral values and respectable life ( $\chi^2 = 5.7$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ; for  $df = 1$ ).

As regards life goals which will be the easiest to fulfill by the youth from the Polish-Czech borderland, the following indications were made (cf., Figure 5):

- peaceful life among family and friends (PL – 44%, CR – 50%),
- comfortable life free of problems (PL – 23%, CR – 34%),
- life full of changes, adventures and attractions (PL – 17%, CR – 18%),
- knowledge, education and scientific achievements (PL – 13%, CR – 13%).

Environment: Weighted arithmetic means\*  
Wilks's lambda=.84185, F(11, 230)=3.9279, p=.00003  
Decomposition of effective hypotheses

Environment

1.a  
1.b  
1.c  
1.d  
1.e  
1.f  
1.g  
1.h  
1.i  
1.j  
1.k

10.5

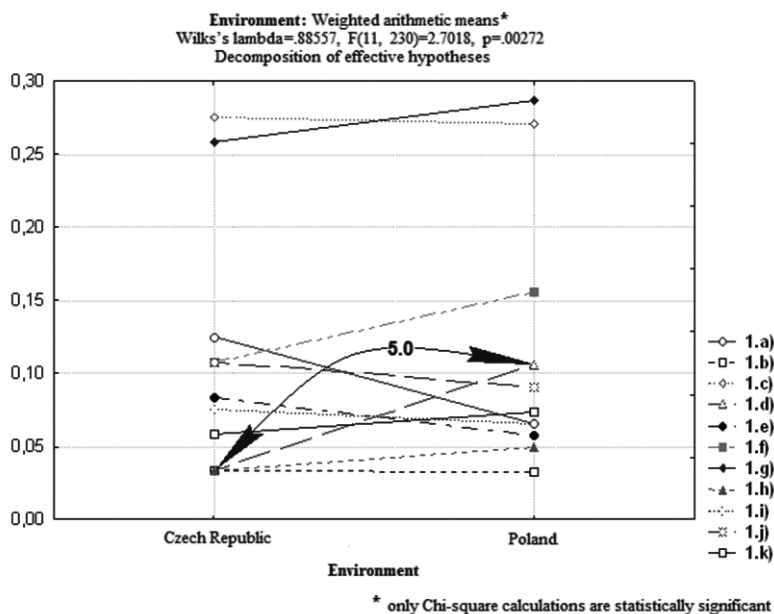
\* only Chi-square calculations are statistically significant

Source: own elaboration.

Similarly to their younger peers from the fourth grade, the examined youth assess their life goals which they will not be able to fulfill. They constitute the following arrangement (cf., Figure 6):

- popularity, fame and success (PL – 27%, CR – 28%),
- fortune and high living standards (PL – 29%, CR – 26%),
- top positions, supervising people and making decisions (PL – 16%),
- comfortable life free of problems (CR -13%).

**Figure 6.** Life goals which the eighth-graders from the Czech Republic and second-graders from Polish middle school cannot achieve



Key: a. comfortable life free of problems; b. peaceful life among family and friends; c. popularity, fame, success; d. exciting job, professional career; e. knowledge, education, scientific achievements; f. top position, supervising people, decision making; g. fortune, high living standards; h. implementation of moral values, respectable life; i. engagement in social issues, civil activeness; j. participation in culture, artistic activity, creativity; k. life full of changes, adventures and attractions.

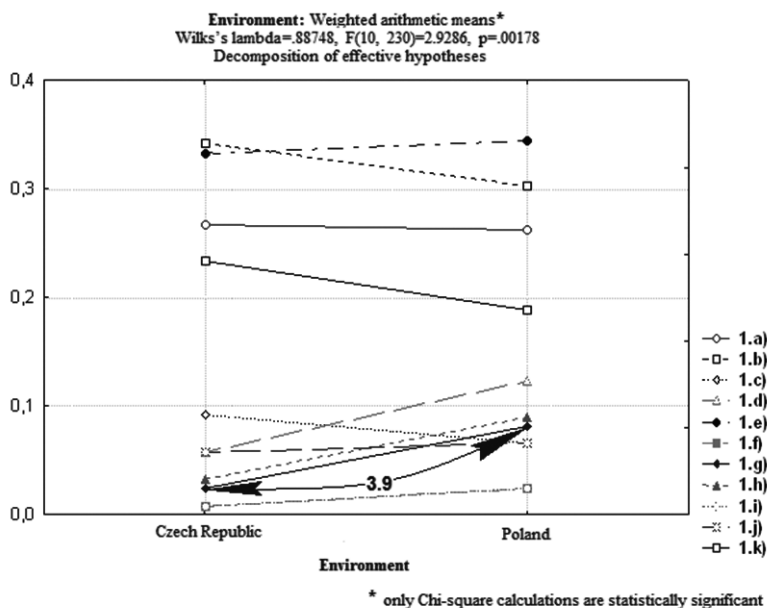
Source: own elaboration.

While choosing life goals which they think they will not be able to achieve, the middle school learners from Poland most frequently indicate exciting job and professional career ( $\chi^2 = 5.0$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ; for  $df = 1$ ).

The profile of life goals is completed by the opinions of the youth on the partial implementation of these goals and the assessment of satisfaction in this field. The most frequent choices comprise the following goals (cf., Figure 7):

- peaceful life among family and friends (PL – 30%, CR – 34%),
- knowledge, education, scientific achievements (PL – 34%, CR – 33%),
- comfortable life free of problems (PL – 26%, CR – 27%),
- life full of changes, adventures and attractions (PL – 19%, CR – 23%).

**Figure 7.** Life goals which are already partially implemented by the eighth-graders from the Czech Republic and second-graders from Polish middle school



Key: a. comfortable life free of problems; b. peaceful life among family and friends; c. popularity, fame, success; d. exciting job, professional career; e. knowledge, education, scientific achievements; f. top position, supervising people, decision making; g. fortune, high living standards; h. implementation of moral values, respectable life; i. engagement in social issues, civil activeness; j. participation in culture, artistic activity, creativity; k. life full of changes, adventures and attractions.

Source: own elaboration.

While choosing the life goals which they are already partially implementing, the middle school learners from Poland indicate achieving fortune and high living standards ( $\chi^2 = 3.9$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ; for  $df = 1$ ).

The youth from the Polish-Czech borderland present very similar attitudes as regards the possibilities of fulfilling or not of particular life aspirations – in contrast to the differentiated choices of highly ranked values. This specificity of the learners' viewing their "existence in the world" (determined by a particular level of axiological maturity) points both to their social knowledge and the similarity of the socializing situation in the borderland environment. The skillfulness

of the respondents' referring to values reveals what they individually regard as good, what they evaluate positively, what they want to head for and express in the formulated obligations.

## **Conclusions**

The specificity of the Polish-Czech borderland, which is the environment where the examined children and youth grow up, opens the possibility of the multidimensional development of their spiritual life. This particularly refers to the dimension of social culture, which is oriented towards normative values, and of material culture, which enhances the implementation of non-normative values. Among the values preferred by the young both from Zaolzie and Poland, the prevailing set of values can be distinguished – the values associated with comfortable and attractive family life. Family values are still highly ranked in the respondents' declarations, especially in the Czech part of the borderland. This indicates the well-preserved cross-generation continuity – family is the most appreciated value, the fundamental educational environment and the place where values are transmitted. Yet, the majority of the children and youth are not interested in participation in culture, engagement in social issues, and undertaking civil activities in their countries. A very low feeling of effectiveness in social issues is manifested not only by the learners from the borderland but it is a feature typical of the whole young generation in Poland and the Czech Republic.

The values currently preferred by the learners from Zaolzie and the structure of these values slightly differ from the choices made 25 years ago by the young attending schools with Polish as the teaching language. Contemporary youth attributes more significance only to work and professional career, but values less the top positions and supervising people as well as engaging in social issues and citizen activities. In spite of this quarter of a century which has passed, such a structure of values and the subsystems functioning within it may confirm very little proneness to change of the Polish community living in Zaolzie. This seems to be determined by more traditional family upbringing, the bonds with the past and the well-preserved cross-generation continuity. What is more, another important determinant of shaping learners' feeling of cultural identity and, at the same time, of their axiological awareness, is the educational activity undertaken by schools with Polish as the teaching language. This has also been confirmed by research results of many other studies conducted in this borderland territory.

The fulfillment and implementation of the respondents' life goals is differentiated by their environment and the preferred values. A tendency can be observed that the learners from schools with Polish as the teaching language focus mostly on the group of aspirations associated with comfortable and attractive family life, which they can fulfill, they will be able to fulfill most easily, and they are partially already implementing. Most frequently, the children from the Polish part of the borderland do not identify the goals which they will aim at in life with the ones they can achieve. Apart from this, in the context of economic, social and cultural determinants of their country, they present an overrated evaluation of their chances and possibilities concerning the implementation of all life aspirations.

The general picture of the respondents' axiological preferences involves: a lowered level of the whole system of values, the growing tendency to focus on life for oneself, increased significance of individual-private values, in opposition to social values, and the aiming at self-fulfillment, understood as the conduct in compliance with one's own potentialities and needs, which rejects all ideologies, including the religious one.

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